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Chinese students' perceptions of ESL peer response group interaction

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Abstract

This study investigated Chinese students' interaction styles and reactions to one particular pedagogic technique: peer response groups in ESL composition classes. In a microethnographic study, three peer response groups in an advanced ESL composition class were videotaped for 6 consecutive weeks. After videotaping, the interviewers met with individual Chinese-speaking ($n = 3$) and Spanish-speaking ($n = 2$) group members. The Spanish-speaking students were interviewed in order to have a point of comparison. In each of the sessions, the interviewer and the student viewed the videotapes of the peer response group in which the student had participated and discussed the group's interactions. The interviews were audiotaped, and the tapes were transcribed. The transcripts from the interviews were examined recursively by the researchers; emerging patterns or themes were noted; the data were analyzed again using these themes as coding categories; and the data were organized according to these codes. This analysis

yielded a description of the key informants' perceptions of their construction of peer response group interaction. The analysis indicated that the Chinese students' primary goal for the groups was social "to maintain group harmony" and that this goal affected the nature and types of interaction they allowed themselves in group discussions. The Chinese students were reluctant to initiate comments and, when they did, monitored themselves carefully so as not to precipitate conflict within the group. This self-monitoring led them to avoid criticism of peers' work and to avoid disagreeing with comments about peers' or their own writing.



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